

## **The Kind Gift of Repentance**

January 22, 2012

### **Readings**

sermon text: Jonah 3:1-5, 10\*

additional texts: Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

The readings revolve around the theme of how we are called to live in light of a coming inevitable Kingdom. The word of the gospel demands repentance. In effect, we are called to live in the light of a new set of circumstance, a new reality. This requires that we have a change of thinking, a change of heart, and a change of behavior. This is repentance. Jesus referred to this Gospel, a new life, as “good news”. The coming inevitable kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness and peace. This new reality, subscribed to as an act of faith, should affect us in several ways:

- The way we abhor sin and seek righteousness and truth.
- The way we seek the Lord’s glory in all things.
- The way we handle money and possessions
- The enterprise we give our lives to.

The story of Nineveh is full of miracles. It is not just the story about a man who survived being swallowed by a fish. The greatest miracle is that God, in His mercy, granted repentance to Nineveh, a despised and feared enemy of Israel. The second miracle is, that Nineveh repented. It is a missionary story.

### **1. Why would God’s granting of repentance to Nineveh be a greater miracle than the miracle that Jonah was swallowed by a fish and spit out alive?**

#### **Jonah had reason to run the other way: Nineveh described**

Nineveh was feared, hated (a couple generations later, in 722 B.C. they invaded Israel and carried them off into exile (slavery). It was the center of worship of the goddess Ishtar. Eventually, in 612 B.C., Nineveh was destroyed and it was never rebuilt. It’s ruins exist today in the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq.

Nahum’s prophecy mentions Nineveh’s sin: Zephaniah 2:13-15 also issues a warning.

- prostitution
- violence
- oppression of those it conquered
- cruelty
- cult worship
- witchcraft
- see Revelation 17
- destroyed by flood and fire in 612 B.C.

Zeph. 2:13-15 -- prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh “All who pass by her scoff and shake her fists.”

Matt 12:41 & Luke 11:32 -- The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

## **Repentance**

Repentance is a normal course of a healthy life. We repent whenever we are confronted with a new reality, or with truth. It is a healthy, well-balanced life. It is those who cannot or will not 'repent' in the face of new realities, who have difficulty. Insanity is described as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. If that is true, then repentance is the opposite of insanity.

I repented after I discovered that the drill bit would not bore a hole in the wood if it was turning counter-clockwise. I flipped the switch to make it go the other way.

I repented after a wood chip flew into my eye while I was running a table saw. I started wearing safety goggles.

I repented after I learned that some kinds of chocolate had slave labor in their production chain. I bought a different brand.

I repented after I found out our furnace was old and not very energy efficient. I had it replaced.

I repented after a large dog came after me as I was riding my bike on a remote country road. Next time I took a different road.

I repented after I ate too much sauerkraut.

### **2. Share one comical – or not so comical – way you have without a doubt repented.**

## **Repentance is a gift**

Repentance evokes all that is despised about religion. It evokes a caricature of religion – angry, vengeful, judgmental, and hateful.

Yet repentance is a gift. It is actually a gracious provision of a gracious God. He is gracious enough to give us warning. And He is gracious enough to provide a better way. It is God's kindness that leads us to repentance. (Romans 2:4)

A few days ago I was in a small town looking for a church. I stopped and asked an older woman walking her dog. She kindly told me I was going the wrong way. She didn't use the word, but she was, in effect, telling me I needed to repent. Not only that, but she gave me the directions towards my destination. **God is like that** – in his kindness he is telling us we are going the wrong way, and, in his kindness, he gives us a better way. Repentance is the healthy response to truth.

- 3. Have you thought of repentance as an act of grace by God toward you? If not, how have you viewed or thought of repentance? What has it meant to you?**
- 4. Share one way God has shown His kindness to you by showing you a better way. What keeps you in the better way? Or – What has drawn you away from the better way?**

## **Jonah's message – Nineveh's response**

Jonah preached a simple message. "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them put on sackcloth.

The king did as well. The details of his repentance are noteworthy:

"He rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust."

He stepped off his own throne.

This is the very heart, the ground zero of repentance – to recognize the Lord God as the true God and to step off our own throne and acknowledge him as the true king.

- 5. What throne is God asking you to step down from? What activity, relationship, thought process takes so much of your time that you are not spending time with Him? Think and pray on this.....if you are not where you want to be in your relationship with God, something or someone is occupying your time and thoughts; could it be that it or they have become a throne or idol in your life.**
- 6. What keeps you in this relationship or activity? Ask yourself what advantage you are experiencing in it – there must be a payoff, even if it is running from pain or truth.**
- 7. What symptoms can we look for in our lives that may indicate that we are on the throne of our own life?**
- 8. What would it take for you to step off the throne?**

### **The Supreme Fact**

The supreme fact, however – the most important reality is this - that God is, and that He has revealed himself to us in Jesus, the Christ.

The sheer fact of Christ requires repentance.

See Acts 2:37-38

“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’

Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.

The far off were the Ninevites – far off in miles and in culture and background. We are the far off too. God in his grace is granting you and I repentance.

- 9. Have you ever considered worship as an act of repentance? Discuss what this means.**
- 10. How does the posture of your heart indicate who or what is on the throne of your life?**
- 11. Take time to worship, praise, and pray – thanking God for granting the grace of repentance.**
- 12. How would seeing repentance as an act of grace by God, and then repenting as the Lord leads us ,....how would this impact our ability to love others as Christ loves us?**